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CANADIANA

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Readings Booklet

January 1997



English 33

Part B: Reading

Grade 12 Diploma Examination

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January 1997
English 33 Part B: Reading
Readings Booklet
Grade 12 Diploma Examination

Description

Part B: Reading contributes 50% of the total English 33 Diploma Examination mark.

There are 8 reading selections in the Readings Booklet and 70 questions in the Questions Booklet.

Time: 2 hours. You may take an additional 1/2 hour to complete the examination.

Instructions

- Be sure that you have an English 33 Readings Booklet **and** an English 33 Questions Booklet.
- You may **not** use a dictionary, thesaurus, or other reference materials.



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I. Questions 1 to 9 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a short story.

from VULCAN

I could tell that Steve and Donna DiCesare did not like Duane much. They were afraid that he would not know his job and that his mistakes would cost them money.

5 “The thought of that kid running a twenty-thousand-dollar grain truck makes my hair turn gray,” Donna said.

We were drinking coffee in the kitchen. Supper was over, and Duane had gone out into the yard with Pete.¹ Pete had his toolbox out and they were going to do some work on the half-ton.

10 “Manpower never has the men to send us,” Steve said. “You get boys from the city or old rummy alcoholics, and you’re supposed to bring the grain in.”

“The government does not think of the hardworking farmer these days,” Donna said.

“The men we used to get all make better money up on the rigs,” Steve said.

15 “Or on unemployment, hanging around the beer parlors in Calgary,” Donna said.

“The rigs, the pipeline, the tar sands,” Steve said. “The money in Alberta, now—”

“This country used to be full of hard workers, but now everyone has got it easy,” Donna said. . . . “So now we’re stuck with Duane.” . . .

20 “He paid eight hundred bucks for that half-ton up at Prince Albert,” Steve said. “Thinks he got a good deal. Whoever sold it to him ought to be arrested—the thing’s not safe to put on the road.”

“Where does he come from?” I asked.

25 “Saskatchewan. He was washing cars in PA.² He says he’s been a truck driver before. I drove around with him, and he knows how to split-shift, anyhow. He says he wants to go up on the rigs and be a driller.”

“That’ll be the day,” I said.

“God help us if he crashes into the combine,” Donna said.

30 “I’m going to let Pete ride around with him,” Steve said. “Pete can help him out. They get along together okay. Pete’s quite a mechanic. He’s got a better set of tools than I do. Ever since Duane got here, him and Pete have been fooling around with the half-ton. Maybe Pete can get it running better. He’s been looking for an engine to work on. He overhauled the swather last spring.”

Continued

¹Pete is the DiCesare’s 12-year-old son.

²PA—Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

35 "I don't want Pete spending a lot of time with that man," Donna said.
 "Duane's just a kid. He's a little rough, but he's harmless."
 Donna stood up to get the coffeepot from the stove.
 "How old are you?" she said to me.
 "Twenty-three."
 "You look older." She poured coffee for her husband and then for me. "You
40 look like one of the men we used to see around here. You look like a worker."
 "Why did you leave Nova Scotia?" Steve asked.
 "I just wanted to come out west."
 "What is it everyone is after, coming out here?" Donna said.
 "Jobs and money," I told her.
45 I took a sip of coffee. I like real kitchen coffee, the kind they make on the
 farms, the kind we used to have back home. I like kitchens in old houses in the
 country, with curtains in the window and the kids' drawings stuck to the door of
 the fridge. I like sitting at the kitchen table, looking through a kitchen window
 and seeing a row of windbreak poplars along the road. I like that coffee. Up on
50 the rigs and in the logging camps you get your coffee out of a steel urn, with
 twenty men lined up behind you.
 When I got up to leave, Steve said, "Keep an eye on that Duane, will you?"
 "Okay."
 "If Pete was old enough, we'd only need one man," Steve said. "I hate this
55 thing of having to depend on someone like that."
 "We'll give him a chance," Donna said.
 By ten the next morning the dew was off the crop, and the threshing began.
 The combine never stopped moving. When the hoppers were full, a truck would
 draw up alongside and move down the row as the combine unloaded a cloudy
60 stream of yellow grain. When the truck was full, a horn sounded and the truck
 pulled away, bouncing across the stubble field to a break in the fence and speeding
 down the section road to the highway for a fast run to the elevators in town. After
 unloading at an elevator, the truck raced back to catch another load.
 We ate meals served from the back of a station wagon. We sat around a card
65 table, on folding chairs, eating food that had been brought out from the house in
 glass serving dishes. After eating we would have coffee and sit there for a few
 minutes, smoking, or chewing a bit of straw picked up from the stubble. If Pete
 was there, he and Duane would bicker back and forth about Duane's old pickup.
 If Pete wasn't around, Duane didn't have much to say. Once he asked me about
70 the rigs.
 "You been up there, ain't you?" he asked.
 "Yes, I have. I was up two seasons."

Continued

“Well, I’m going up there next year,” he said. “What’s it like?”

75 When I first came to Alberta, on the train from Halifax, my big idea was to
get rich up on the rigs. I worked drilling for two years, mostly up along the
Saskatchewan border. I quit because I was tired of being surrounded by trash and
because I wasn’t saving any money.

80 “I want to make some real money,” said Duane. “I want to fix up my truck.
Pete says I need a new block. I’d like some mag wheels, is what I’d like. I made
a down payment on a set before I left PA.”

I knew that Duane could never be a driller. They’d take one look at him and
turn him down. He was too scrawny and the work would kill him. They are pretty
hard men up there, none crueller than some of the Cape Bretoners.³ He wouldn’t
last a week up on the rigs.

85 I tried to tell him, but of course he didn’t understand.

Peter Behrens
Contemporary Canadian writer

³Cape Bretoners—Cape Breton Island is in Nova Scotia, the narrator’s home province

II. Questions 10 to 17 in your Questions Booklet are based on this poem.

THE FISH WITH A COIN IN ITS MOUTH¹

A picture pops into my head.
A picture I don't recall ever
having seen before.
A ship,
5 huge coils of rope
rougher than a cat's tongue,
great sweet-smelling piles
of lumber, masts reaching for the sky,
a pit of darkness that must be
10 an open hatch.
Many people are there
who feel that in coming
they've done something
important.
15 I am among them,
a small boy in shorts
and a blue beret.
Perhaps there is a band
and perhaps the people
20 are cheering
or perhaps that is only how it feels.
Oh, that! My father says when
I tell him. Your uncle and I
we took you down to Hantsport
25 to see the *Bluenose*,²
the fastest fishing schooner
there ever was. You were about

Continued

¹The fish with a coin in its mouth—refers to Matthew 17:27 in the Bible. In this verse, Jesus has instructed Peter to get the money to pay tribute, a kind of tax, by casting a hook and finding a piece of money in the mouth of the first fish that he catches.

²*Bluenose*—Canada's most famous sailing ship, launched at Lunenburg, Nova Scotia in 1921. The schooner was designed to fish the Grand Banks and to race against the fastest American schooners. A profile of the *Bluenose* appears on the Canadian dime.

three years old.
I'd have thought you'd
30 have forgotten that.

And so I had
—until one night
after thirty-seven years,
for no apparent reason,
35 it all came back.

Alden Nowlan (1933–1983)
Canadian poet

III. Questions 18 to 27 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a play.

from RED FLAG AT EVENING

CHARACTERS:

BESSIE HARRISON

SUSAN MILLINGTON—Bessie's cousin

ELMER ENGELTREE—Bessie's gentleman friend

The setting is MISS BESSIE's tiny living room in a small-town cottage. The time is the early twentieth century. BESSIE and ELMER have been seeing each other regularly for thirteen years. While SUSAN is visiting BESSIE, she insists that BESSIE confront ELMER that evening about his intentions.

SUSAN: Will you ask him to name the day?

BESSIE: Oh, Susan, I couldn't. I'd be a . . . a hussy.

SUSAN: Then I'll ask him! (*She sits on the settee.*)

BESSIE: Oh, no! I couldn't bear that. Oh, there he comes up Main Street now.

5 (*She sees ELMER through the window.*)

SUSAN: Bessie, Andrew's¹ going to Red Deer tomorrow to a sale. I've decided that unless you and Elmer get something settled tonight, you're going on a visit to your Aunt Lillian.

10 BESSIE (*In a flutter*): But I'd see Mr. Hagedorn there. That wouldn't be fair to Elmer after thirteen years, would it, Susan?

SUSAN: Mr. Hagedorn sounds a lot more suitable to you than Elmer Engeltree, but I suppose you've got used to Elmer.

BESSIE: I just wouldn't want to hurt his feelings.

15 SUSAN: Bessie, you see this red flag you hang out the door when you want me to save milk for you? (*She takes up a red flag from the table.*)

BESSIE: Of course I see it, Susan. How could I help it? Oh, dear, I must get this bedspread² away before Elmer comes. I wouldn't want to embarrass him. (*She puts it under the cushion of the chair.*)

20 SUSAN: Hmm! It would do him good. Now, Bessie, if you and Elmer get things settled, I won't be interfering. But if you don't decide tonight, I want you to put this red flag out the back door as a sign that Andrew's to come for you in the morning. You can surprise your Aunt Lillian . . .

Continued

¹Andrew is Susan's husband.

²Bessie is making a bedspread for her trousseau.

BESSIE: But it's brazen, Susan. It's downright brazen.
 SUSAN: Then I'll stay and have a talk with Elmer.

25 BESSIE: No! *(There is a pause. Finally her eyes drop before the determination in SUSAN's eyes.)* I'll ask him, Cousin Susan. I'd die if you did.

SUSAN: Now you're talking like your father's daughter.
(There is a knock at the door. BESSIE hurriedly tidies her hair. SUSAN draws the settee before the fire. As BESSIE goes to the door, SUSAN gets a picture of a wedding party from the table and puts it in a conspicuous place on the
 30 *mantle.)*

BESSIE *(At the door)*: Come in, Elmer. *(Flustered)* We were—I was—I was expecting you.
(ELMER ENGELTREE is a fussy, hard-bitten little man of over forty. He takes
 35 *off his scarf, his overcoat, and his mittens and gives them to BESSIE, then removes his overshoes.)*

ELMER: Can't say I'm surprised at that, Bessie. It's Wednesday night, isn't it? Hello, Susan.

BESSIE: Yes, but it's sort of a . . . a special Wednesday night, isn't it?

40 ELMER: Can't say I'd noticed anything special about the night. Except shoe sales fall off on Wednesday.

SUSAN *(Meaningfully)*: Bessie and I were just saying that you ought to do pretty well in the shoe store, Elmer.

ELMER: Not bad, Susan, not bad. I don't spare the shoe leather.

45 SUSAN: Well, I'll run along. Bessie. You'll be wanting to talk to Elmer.

BESSIE *(Dropping ELMER'S things on the chair at the right)*: Oh, no, I don't! *(Flustered)* I mean, don't hurry away, Susan. Oh, please sit down, Elmer. I hadn't noticed . . .

SUSAN: Well, if you'd rather, I'll sit down and have a chat with Elmer.

50 BESSIE: No!

ELMER: Don't worry about me. I don't aim to talk much. *(He sits on the settee.)*

SUSAN: I aimed to do the talking, Elmer.

BESSIE: You'd better go—right away—Susan. Andrew will be worrying. *(She edges SUSAN toward the door.)* Well, goodbye—so glad you came—I know
 55 your dress will be all right—say "hello" to Andrew for me . . .

SUSAN *(Not to be hurried)*: Goodbye, Elmer. *(At the door)* Remember, Bessie—the red flag means Aunt Lillian! I'll watch for an hour and if it isn't out, I'll come back. *(She leaves.)*

ELMER *(Crossly)*: What's she got in her bonnet? Red flag? You haven't gone
 60 Communist, have you?

BESSIE: Oh, it's just a signal, Elmer—about saving the milk—Susan runs on so, doesn't she?

Continued

ELMER: Stubbornest woman in the province. What have you got a fire in May for?

65 BESSIE (*Coming toward him*): Well, it's . . . it's what I told you . . . about it being a special kind of Wednesday today . . . I mean the trees are getting green next month and already there's a . . . a sort of a . . . a hum in the air.

ELMER (*Sharply*): What's that? Hum? If you mean mosquitoes are out, Bessie, why don't you say so?

70 BESSIE (*She's hurt. She sits down primly at the left of the fireplace*): Things can hum without being mosquitoes, Mr. Engeltree.

ELMER (*He ignores this entirely. He sneezes and shows much concern for his health. He shakes his head*): This is bad weather for colds. I'd not be surprised if I hadn't got a chill just walking from the boarding house up here.

75 BESSIE: Sit nearer the fire, Elmer, and get good and warm.

ELMER: Evening paper here yet?

BESSIE: I'll get it. But there's no news in it, hardly. (*She gets the paper from the table.*)

ELMER (*Adjusting his reading glasses*): Sitting in this kind of light is mighty hard

80 on a man's eyes.

BESSIE (*Giving him the paper and returning to her chair*): Oh, but the firelight's so cosy and . . . homelike, isn't it, Elmer?

ELMER (*Looking at the paper*): Can't see a blame thing.

BESSIE: The only news is that Matilda Brown and Jimmy Dawson were married

85 yesterday. A very pretty ceremony—double ring.

ELMER: Yeah, I sold Jimmy his shoes. Had to order a special size for him.

BESSIE (*Struggling to get his attention from the paper*): How is the shoe business, Elmer?

ELMER: Same as it ever was. (*Perusing the paper*) A man makes a living in a

90 shoe store even if he doesn't get a new car every spring.

BESSIE (*Taking the cushion over to put behind ELMER*): The idea of a small family needing a car is just useless extravagance. Don't you think so, Elmer?

ELMER: Lots of things I want before I buy me a car.

BESSIE (*Tenderly*): What . . . sort of things, Elmer? (*Leaning over the settee*)

95 ELMER (*Oblivious of her tenderness*): I figure on getting me a new radio, with ear phones.

BESSIE: I see. (*A pause*) Elmer, I never mentioned it before in all these years but . . . (ELMER looks inquiringly at her over his glasses.) Elmer . . . (*She can't go on. She sees the bedspread that she has secretly been working on for two years in all its greenness on the chair from which she took the cushion. She edges over to it and conceals it behind her back.*) Elmer, if you want to smoke a pipe in this room, I'd be quite agreeable.

100

Continued

ELMER (*Outraged*): A pipe! With my weak chest. Bessie, what on earth has come over you? I never smoked tobacco in any form and I hope I never start.

105 BESSIE (*Sitting down on the settee and stuffing the bedspread down under the end*): Of course not, Elmer. I think you're wise. Mr. Hagedorn smokes a pipe . . . I guess I just forgot . . .

ELMER: Well, whoever Mr. Hagedorn is, he can have his pipe, if he wants to ruin his constitution. (*He looks at her closely.*) Say, Bessie, you're looking a bit

110 feverish. You better light the lamp and get supper on. I wouldn't be surprised but you're getting anemic from hugging the fire too much.

BESSIE (*Her spirit is roused. She gets up*): Why, Elmer Engeltree, I'm as hard working a woman as you'll find in this town.

ELMER: Still, with only yourself to do for . . .

115 BESSIE (*Prompting him, gently*): Yes, Elmer?

ELMER: Well, the busy woman's the happy woman. That's what I always say. You better get the table set before it's too dark.

BESSIE (*Going to the table and pulling it into the middle of the room*): Yes, I was just going to put the cloth on. (*She stops, her hands on the table.*) Elmer.

120 ELMER (*He has gone back to his paper*): Shoes are going up. I told the manager they would. Told him two weeks ago.

BESSIE (*At last she knows she's got to face it. She stands very straight, a brave little figure*): Elmer, you've been calling on me for nearly thirteen years.

ELMER: Fourteen, Bessie. Started the last year I was riding my bicycle. We're

125 not so young as we once were. I used to be able to ride a bicycle straight up Main Street Hill.

BESSIE: But you're not old, Elmer. Forty-three. Why, you're just seven years older than I am . . .

ELMER: I figure on selling shoes a long time yet. I don't ruin my constitution

130 with tobacco and strong coffee like most men.

BESSIE: Elmer, we've reached an age where I think we should be able to talk frankly with one another, don't you?

ELMER: I always speak my mind. Mother used to say, "You can always depend on Elmer to speak his mind." And she was right.

135 BESSIE: Elmer, I'm going to speak my mind, too. I know you'll respect me for it. Elmer, you've been coming to see me four evenings a week for thirteen years.

ELMER (*Annoyed at her inaccuracy*): Fourteen, Bessie. I remember the date perfectly. First time I ate your mince pie.

BESSIE (*Approaching him shyly*): Elmer, don't you think it's about time we

140 thought of getting married?

Continued

ELMER (*Looking at her over his paper*): You're right, Bessie, you're right. There's only one trouble about that. We're getting on, you know. (*He turns back to his paper.*) Who is there in town who would have us now?

145 **BESSIE** (*She stares at him in astonishment. She whispers as if she can't believe her ears*): "Who is there who would have us?" Why, Elmer Engeltree . . . (*He is oblivious of her astonishment which suddenly changes into anger. She goes over and opens the door wide and stands beside it.*) I'm a patient woman, Elmer Engeltree . . .

150 **ELMER** (*Without hearing or seeing her*): Shut the door, Bessie . . . I have to be mighty careful about drafts.

BESSIE (*Without realizing what she has in her hand, she takes up the red flag and advances on him menacingly*): Elmer Engeltree, you take your bad temper and your bad health and your weak chest right out of my house. Susan was right. You're a selfish fussbudget and I've taken a long time to find it out.

155 Who is there who would have us? Mr. Hagedorn courted me at Aunt Lillian's and I was distant to him because I didn't want to be unfair to you. You go right home and get your radio with ear phones and sit there and listen by yourself. And don't you come back here . . . You're right . . . Nobody would have you . . . Nobody but me would have been so blind.

160 **ELMER**: Why, Bessie! I told you I thought you were feverish. What if you've got something catching? I better get out of here all right. I'm very susceptible to things . . . (*He gathers up his coat and his mittens and his scarf and his overshoes.*)

BESSIE: You'd better get out all right, Elmer. I believe I've got something awful

165 . . . I believe I've got hydrophobia³ and I'm feeling awfully like biting something . . .

ELMER: Goodbye, Bessie. I'll send the doctor right up . . . Watch out . . . don't hit me with that red flag . . .

170 (*He makes a humiliating retreat. BESSIE watches him for a moment. Then her eyes fall on the red flag she is holding in her hand. She doesn't recognize its significance for a moment. Then slowly, in a kind of dazed astonishment, she waves it out the back door, as a signal to SUSAN. She is still waving it as the curtain falls.*)

Gwen Pharis Ringwood
Canadian playwright

³hydrophobia—rabies

IV. Questions 28 to 36 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from an article.

from BATTLE FOR YOUR BRAIN

... Beavis and Butt-head [are] two animated miscreants whose adventures at the low end of the food chain are currently the most popular program on MTV. Caught in the ungainly nadir¹ of adolescence, they are not nice boys. They torture animals, they harass girls and sniff paint thinner. They like to burn things. They have a really insidious laugh: *huh-huh huh-huh*. They are the spiritual descendants of the semi-sentient² teens from “Wayne’s World” and “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure,” only dumber and meaner. The downward spiral of the living white male surely ends here: in a little pimple named Butt-head whose idea of an idea is “Hey, Beavis, let’s go over to Stuart’s house and light one in his cat’s butt.”

For a generation reminded hourly of its diminished prospects, these losers have proven remarkably embraceable. “Why do I like ‘Beavis and Butt-head’?” asks Warren Lutz, 26, a journalism major at San Francisco State. “You’re asking me to think, dude.” Created by beginner animator Mike Judge, 30, for a festival of “sick and

twisted” cartoons last year, Beavis and Butt-head have become a trash phenomenon. T shirts, hats, key rings, masks, buttons, calendars, dolls are all working their way to malls; a book, a comic book, a movie, a CD and a Christmas special are in the works. David Letterman drops a Beavis and Butt-head joke almost nightly; later this fall the pair will become a semi-regular feature on his program. . . . [Beavis and Butt-head] are clearly the new morons in town.

They are also part of a much wider TV phenomenon, one that drives not just stupid laughs but the front-page battle now being waged for control of Paramount Pictures. It is the battle to play road hog on the Information Highway. As cable technology continues to expand our range of viewing options, the old boundaries of propriety and decency no longer apply. Beavis and Butt-head join a growing crowd of characters who have found a magic formula: nothing cuts through the clutter like a slap of bracing crudity. Nothing stops a channel surfer like the word “sucks.”

Stupidity, served with a knowing intelligence, has become the next

Continued

¹nadir—lowest point

²semi-sentient—only partially aware or conscious

best thing to smarts. Letterman's signature "Stupid Pet Tricks" bit, now 11 years running, introduced a new voice to television: ironic, self-aware, profoundly interested in the ingrained dumbness of the tube. Instead of dumbing down, it made smart comedy out of the process of dumbing down—and it clicked. Barry Diller successfully built Fox into the fourth network on a shockingly *lumpen*³ cartoon family, the Simpsons, and an even more *lumpen* real one, the Bundys of "Married . . . With Children." Nickelodeon's cartoon "The Ren & Stimpy Show," the highest-rated original series on cable, follows the scatological⁴ adventures of a Chihuahua and a cat, sometimes not getting much farther than the litter box. The network's new contender, "Rocko's Modern World," wallows down a similarly inspired low road. Its first episode, in which a home-shopping channel called "Lobot-o-shop" pitched items like tapeworm farms for kids, beat "Ren & Stimpy" in the ratings. . . . "There's a purity to [this] kind of ignorance," says "Beavis and Butt-head" writer David Felton, at 53 MTV's oldest staff member. "Going back to the basic point where thinking begins. And staying there."

But they are not just any losers, this lineage of losers. They are

specifically *our* losers, totems of an age of decline and nonachievement. One in five people who graduated from college between 1984 and 1990 holds a job that doesn't require a college education. If this is not hard economic reality for a whole generation, it is psychological reality. Loser television has the sense to play along; it taps the anxiety in the culture and plays it back for laughs. Homer Simpson works in a nuclear power plant. Al Bundy sells shoes. Beavis and Butt-head work at Burger World and can't even visualize the good life. In one episode, as an act of community service, they get jobs in a hospital. Sucking on IV bags, planning to steal a cardiac patient's motorized cart, they agree: "It doesn't get any better than this, dude."

The shows also all share a common language. When "Beavis and Butt-head" producer John Andrews, 39, needed to put together a writing staff, he first called Letterman head writer Rob Burnett for suggestions. "Most of this stuff is done by overeducated guys who grew up reading *Mad* magazine, *National Lampoon*, and watching 'Animal House' and 'Saturday Night Live'," says Matt Groening, creator of the Simpsons. "Scripts are based on what comes out of the

Continued

³*lumpen*—from *lumpenproletariat*, according to Karl Marx, that part of the working class unable to be improved by revolution

⁴scatological—having a preoccupation with bodily excrement

collective memory of the writers, which is mostly memories of sitting in front of a TV set growing up.” More than just throwbacks to the intelligently dumb television of the Three Stooges and Ernie Kovacs, the current shows are broad immersions in pop culture, satirical and multitiered. They address an audience that can view reruns of “Gilligan’s Island” and “I Dream of Jeannie” half as camp,⁵ half as the fabric of shared experience. “The smarter you are, the more you see single events on different levels simultaneously,” says Fernanda Moore, 25, who likes “The Simpsons,” “Ren & Stimpy” and “Beavis and Butt-head.” A doctoral

160 candidate at Stanford, Moore is the daughter we all crave and perhaps fear. “Dumb people I know,” she says, “aren’t self-referential.”

Of course, this is only one way to watch the shows. Lars Ulrich, drummer in the band Metallica, was delighted one day to spot Beavis wearing a Metallica T shirt. Yet he was also alarmed. “I would have to say—as little as I want to say it—that I think there are people like that. I’m not sure dumb is the right word. I would go more in the direction of the word ignorant.” Either way, as the channels open up, the ship of fools is now sailing at full capacity.

John Leland
American journalist

⁵camp—mediocrity so extreme as to have a perverse appeal

V. Read the first draft of Robin's letter to his friend Jesse in Calgary. Read the letter carefully, noting the revisions, and answer questions 37 to 43 in your Questions Booklet.

January 5, 1997

416 Nalwen Crescent
Nalwen AB T5J 2J4

Hi Jesse,

Paragraph How are you doing? Remember my last phone call? Well, it went a little over my

1 limit—like \$20! So my parents laid down the law, and I have to cool it until I get my first cheque from Nalwen Foods. That's right! I got a part-time job. Lucky, hey? But enough of that! ^{Do you remember talking to my dad about T.V. programs when you visited us in Nalwen?} Would you believe that an English assignment actually gave me an argument to use with my dad, who just hates our favourite program, "The Simpsons?" You know how Dad's argument goes—"How can you waste time watching anything so dumb?" Well, according to the article I read, "dumb" is in.

Paragraph Anyway, we were given this English assignment to do on humour. How we ^{handled} ~~handle~~

2 it was up to us. We had a really good discussion on humour (types of humour, value of humour, and so on). I asked our librarian if she had anything on the type of humour used in "The Simpsons," and she found the article "Battle for Your Brain." The title sure threw me but when I read it I knew it was right on. Apparently "The Simpsons" is just one of a group of programs that have a "magic formula" of "bracing crudity." It seems that the ^{people} ~~guys~~ who create programs such as "Beavis and Butt-head," "The Ren and Stimpy Show," and "Rocko's Modern World" are pushing "dumb" real good. They can take the idea of losers, and make

Continued

themselves winners with it, at least in the world of television. ^{Ironical,} ~~Humorous,~~ right?

Paragraph The writer of the article, John Leland, says that Ren and Stimpy are a
3 Chihuahua and a cat who are hung up on their litter box. Beavis and Butt-head
are [“]animated miscreants [”] who enjoy torturing animals. The article also notes
that “Beavis and Butt-head” writer, David Feldman, believes that “There’s a
purity to [this] kind of ignorance.” I think that “purity” is ^{an inappropriate} ~~a strange~~ word to
connect with the torture of innocent animals though. Don’t you agree?

Paragraph Apparently, “ingrained dumbness” has a serious purpose ^{that, and it’s one that} ~~at that. That~~ we can
4 relate to. The animators comment on “the hard economic reality for a whole
generation” by showing losers in a funny way. The article makes the point that you
can’t expect people to care about abstract ideals when ^{they} ~~you~~ are threatened ^{themselves} ~~yourself~~
because of problems like unemployment. These so-called “dumb” shows are both
funny and serious. They make us laugh even though times are tough. The article
also implies that there is an underlying reason for the influx of these programs,
which is related to competition among the networks. These programs are popular!
I guess it’s up to the viewer to decide if a TV show goes too far when it tries to
make us laugh. Anyway, try to keep laughing yourself! By the way, I showed the
article to my dad, and although he seemed interested in it, he still won’t watch “The
Simpsons!”

Cheers!

Robin

VI. Questions 44 to 52 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from an autobiography.

from LIFE AND DEATH IN SHANGHAI

In 1966, Chinese leader Mao Tse-Tung plunged China into the Cultural Revolution. For ten years, countless people were tortured and killed. One victim was Nien Cheng, whose only crime was being born into a wealthy, landowning family. In the following excerpt, Nien Cheng describes her imprisonment.

In September of 1966 I was taken to the No. 1 Detention House, the foremost detention house for political prisoners in Shanghai, where I was to remain for 6½ years. It was an old establishment where the Kuomintang¹ had once imprisoned Communists. The black Jeep drove through the main gate. I was
5 undressed, searched, photographed, fingerprinted.

“While you are here, you will be known by a number,” the man at the entry desk said. “You’ll no longer use your name, not even to the guards. Your number is 1806.”

I was taken out through another gate into a two-story building where women
10 prisoners were housed. The guard took me to a cell, then pushed the bolt back with a loud clang.

I looked around the room, and my heart sank. Cobwebs dangled from the ceiling; the once whitewashed walls were yellow with age and streaked with dust. The single naked bulb was coated with grime and extremely dim. Patches of the
15 cement floor were black with dampness. A strong musty smell pervaded the air. I hastened to open the only small window, with its rust-pitted iron bars. When I succeeded in pulling the knob and the window swung open, flakes of peeling paint as well as a shower of dust fell to the floor. The only furniture in the room was three narrow beds of rough wooden planks, one against the wall, the other two
20 stacked one on top of the other. A cement toilet was built into one corner. Never in my life had I been in or even imagined a place so primitive and filthy.

The guard came back with several sheets of toilet paper of the roughest kind, which she handed to me through a small square window in the door of the cell, saying, “I’ll lend you this. When you get your supply, you must return to the
25 government the same number of sheets. Now go to sleep. Lie with your head toward the door. That’s the regulation.”

I didn’t want to touch the dust-covered bed. But I needed to lie down, as my legs were badly swollen. I pulled the bed away from the dirty wall and wiped it

Continued

¹Kuomintang—the Chinese Nationalist Party, former opponents of Mao Tse-Tung’s communists

with the toilet paper. But the dirt was so deeply ingrained that I could remove
30 only the loose dust. Then I lay down anyhow and closed my eyes. The naked
bulb hanging from the center of the cell was directly above my head. Though
dim, it irritated me. I looked around the cell but could not see a light switch
anywhere.

“Please!” I called, knocking on the door. “I can’t find the light switch.”

35 “We don’t switch off the light at night. In future, when you want to speak to
the guards, just say, ‘Report.’ Don’t knock on the door. Don’t say anything else.”

I lay down again and turned to the dusty wall to avoid the light. Just before
daybreak, the electric light in the cell was switched off. In the darkness, the dirt
and ugliness of the room disappeared. I could imagine myself elsewhere. During
40 all the years I spent in that prison cell, the short time of darkness after the light
was switched off and before daybreak was always a moment when I recovered the
dignity of my being and felt a sense of renewal, simply because I had a precious
moment of freedom when I was not under the watchful eyes of the guards.

At daybreak, we were awakened by a guard shouting, “Get up! Get up!” The
45 shutter of the small window on the door was pushed open. An oblong aluminum
container appeared. A woman’s voice said impatiently, “Come over, come over.”

When I took the container, she said, “In future, stand here at mealtimes and
wait.” She also handed me a pair of bamboo chopsticks, wet and worn thin with
prolonged usage.

50 The battered container was three-quarters full of lukewarm watery rice
porridge with a few strips of pickled vegetables floating on the top. I wiped the
edge of the container with a piece of toilet paper and took a tentative sip. The rice
tasted smoky, and the saltiness of the pickled vegetables made it bitter. The food
was worse than I could possibly have imagined, but I made a determined effort to
55 drink half of it.

I decided that if I was going to be held here, I could clean out this cell. I
found that I was allowed to buy supplies, so I got a washbasin, two enameled
mugs for eating and drinking, sewing thread, needles, soap, towels, a toothbrush
and toothpaste, and more toilet paper. I washed the bed thoroughly. I climbed
60 onto my rolled-up bedding to wipe the dust-smeared windowpanes so that more
light could come in. After I had washed the cement toilet, I still had enough cold
water left to bathe myself and rinse out my blouse. When hot water for drinking
was issued, I drank it with enjoyment. Plain boiled water had never tasted so
good.

65 Many weeks passed. One day merged into another. Prolonged isolation
heightened my feeling of depression. I longed for some news of my daughter. I

Continued

missed her terribly and worried about her constantly. Often I would be so choked with emotion that breathing became difficult.

70 One day, in the early afternoon, I saw a small spider, no bigger than a good-size pea, climbing up one of the rust-eroded bars. Quite a long walk for such a tiny thing, I thought. When it reached the top, it suddenly swung out and descended on a thin silken thread spun from one end of its body. With a leap and swing, it secured the end of the thread to another bar. The spider then crawled
75 back along the silken thread to where it had started and swung out in another direction. The tiny creature knew its job and was carrying it out with confidence. When the frame was made, the spider proceeded to weave a web that was intricately beautiful and absolutely perfect.

Who had taught the spider how to make a web? Could it really have acquired the skill through evolution, or did God create the spider and endow it with the
80 ability to make a web so that it could catch food and perpetuate its species? Did it act simply by instinct? I knew I had just witnessed something beautiful and uplifting. Whether God had made the spider or not, I thanked him for what I had just seen. A miracle of life had been shown me. Mao Tse-tung and his Revolutionaries seemed much less menacing. I felt a renewal of hope and
85 confidence.

I became very attached to the little spider. First thing in the morning, throughout the day and last thing at night, I would look at it and feel reassured when I saw that it was still there. The tiny spider became my companion. My spirits lightened. The depressing feeling of complete isolation was broken.

Nien Cheng

Nien Cheng survived her ordeal; her captors released her, in the mistaken belief that she was dying of cancer.

VII. Questions 53 to 59 in your Questions Booklet are based on this poem.

THE RATTLESNAKE

(Hell's Canyon, 1978)

He's asleep, or dead, numb with wind
that surprised a whole month.
Coiled on a rock in scrubgrass,
his loops grow angular, circles sinking in
5 on themselves until he appears to be a rock
merely dreaming of snakes. We prod him
with the long stem of a wildflower. Nothing.
But now the head pulls back, no strike,
no evasive maneuver: he seems only polite.
10 We keep poking until suddenly the slope erupts
in rattle. He skids off to the brush
and we are smiling. The rattle was pale,
almost skeletal, its thin horror anemic with spring
or sleep. And for a few seconds he is
15 fully-stretched on the slope, barely a yard long,
a baby. We are grateful—
Not only for his size but for his venom.
He has no idea how he will grow for us
in the miles back home; his head
20 small as the knuckle on my thumb
will grow to a whole fist, the rich brown
body big as a forearm. But for now
we can walk back down smiling,
for a few yards at least, until
25 he already begins to grow, and we plant our feet
carefully as cats, the wind picked up
and noisy, his dry music
still singing in our ears.

Robert Wrigley
American poet

VIII. Questions 60 to 70 in your Questions Booklet are based on this excerpt from a short story.

from THE HUNTSMAN

The author of this short story was a Russian dramatist and short story writer who lived from 1860 to 1904. His themes develop from everyday events affecting prerevolutionary Russian society. He presents many of his characters, tolerantly and sympathetically, as the products of their environment.

Noon, hot and stifling, with no clouds in the sky. The sunburned grass had a dismal, hopeless look. Even if the rains came, it was doubtful whether the grass would ever be green again. The forest was silent, motionless, as though gazing out from the treetops or waiting for something to happen.

- 5 At the edge of the clearing a tall, narrow-shouldered man of forty, wearing a red shirt, patched trousers which had evidently once belonged to a gentleman, and high leather boots, was sauntering along a pathway with lazy, shambling strides. To the right was the green of the clearing, to the left a golden sea of ripened rye stretching to the horizon. His face was ruddy and sweating. A white cap with a
10 straight visor, like those worn by jockeys, perched jauntily on his handsome blond head—the cap must have been the gift of a generous young nobleman. Over his shoulder hung a game bag with a crumpled woodcock lying in it. The man was holding a double-barreled shotgun in his hand, both barrels cocked, and he was screwing up his eyes as he followed the ancient and lean hunting dog which was
15 running on ahead, sniffing at the bushes. There was silence all round, not a sound anywhere. Every living thing had taken refuge from the heat.

“Yegor Vlassich!” The huntsman suddenly heard a soft voice.

- He was startled and turned round, knitting his brows. Beside him, as though she had sprung out of the earth, stood a pale peasant woman of thirty, with a sickle
20 in her hand. She was trying to peer into the face, and she was smiling shyly.

“Oh, it is you, Pelageya!” said the huntsman, and he stopped and slowly uncocked the gun. “Well, how do you happen to be here?”

“The women from our village have come to work here, and so I came with them . . . I’m working with them, Yegor Vlassich.”

- 25 “Ah,” Yegor muttered, and walked slowly on.

Pelageya followed him. They went on in silence for twenty paces.

“It’s a long time since I saw you, Yegor Vlassich,” Pelageya said, gazing tenderly at the movement of his shoulders and shoulder blades. “I remember you dropped into our hut during Easter week for a drink of water, and then I never saw you

Continued

- 30 again. . . . You dropped in for a moment at Easter, and then God knows what was the matter . . . you were quite drunk . . . you swore at me, and gave me a beating, and then you went away. . . . I've waited and waited. . . . I've worn out my eyes waiting. . . . Ah, Yegor Vlassich, Yegor Vlassich! If only you'd come back just once in all that time!"
- 35 "What would I be doing in your place?"
- "No use. . . . Still, there's the house to look after . . . seeing about things. . . . You are the master there! . . . So you shot a woodcock, Yegor? Why don't you sit down and rest awhile. . . ."
- Saying this, Pelageya smiled like an idiot and looked up into Yegor's face.
- 40 Her own face was glowing with happiness.
- "Sit down? Well, if you want me to . . ." Yegor said in a tone of indifference, and he chose a spot in the shade between two fully grown fir trees. "Why are you standing, eh? You sit down, too!"
- Pelageya sat down a little way away in the full sunlight. Ashamed of her
- 45 happiness, she hid her smiles with her hand. Two minutes passed in silence.
- "You might come back to me just once," Pelageya said softly.
- "Why?" Yegor sighed, and he removed his cap and wiped his red forehead with his sleeve. "I don't see any need for it. There's no sense in coming for an hour or two—it will only upset you! And as for living all the time in your village,
- 50 well, it's beyond endurance! You know yourself how I have been spoiled. . . . I have to have a bed, and good tea, and fine conversations. . . . Me, I want all the fine things of life, and as for you—you enjoy the poverty and smoke of your village. . . . I couldn't stand it for even a day. Imagine there came an order saying I must live permanently with you—well, I'd rather set fire to the cottage or lay
- 55 hands on myself! Ever since I was a boy, I was always spoiled—there's no getting away from it!"
- "Where are you living now?"
- "With Dmitry Ivanich, a fine gentleman, and I'm his huntsman. I furnish his table with game . . . and there it is . . . he keeps me more for his own pleasure than
- 60 for anything else."
- "That's not proper kind of work, Yegor Vlassich! . . . People call that fooling around—there's only you who thinks of it as an occupation, a real job of work. . . ."
- "You don't understand, stupid," Yegor said, gazing dreamily at the sky.
- 65 "Ever since you were born, you've never understood what kind of man I am, and you never will. . . . According to you I'm just a crazy half-cocked sort of fellow, but anyone with an ounce of understanding knows that I'm the best shot in the

Continued

whole district. The gentry know that, and they've even written me up in a magazine. There isn't a man who can be compared with me as a huntsman. . . .

70 And it isn't because I am spoiled and proud that I despise the work of your village. From the time when I was a child, as you know, I never had to do with anything except guns and dogs. If they took my gun away, I'd go out with a fishing rod, and if they took my rod away, then I'd find some way to busy myself with my hands. I went in for horse trading and I'd go to fairs when I had money,

75 and you know yourself that when a peasant goes in for hunting and horse trading, then it's good-bye to the plow. Once freedom catches hold of a man, you can never hammer it out of him! In the same way a gentleman who takes up acting or goes in for the arts will never be of any use as an official or a landowner. You're a peasant girl, and you'll never understand that, but it's something you've got to know!"

80

"I do understand it, Yegor Vlassich."

"You obviously don't understand, seeing that you're about to cry."

"I . . . I'm not crying," Pelageya said, turning her head away. "It's a sin, Yegor Vlassich! You ought to come and spend a bit of time with me. I'm so

85 miserable! We've been married for twelve years . . . never once was there any love between us. . . . I . . . I'm not crying."

"Love," Yegor muttered, scratching his arm. "There couldn't be any love between us. It's only on paper we're husband and wife—the truth is we are really nothing at all, eh? You think of me as a wild sort of fellow, and I think of you as

90 a simple peasant girl who doesn't understand anything. We are not much of a pair! I'm a free man, and I've been spoiled, and I go where I please. And you're a laboring woman wearing bast shoes,¹ living in filth, and your back is bent low to the ground. I know all about myself—I know I'm the best huntsman around, and you look at me with pity. . . . There's a fine pair for you!"

95 "We were married in church, Yegor Vlassich," sobbed Pelageya.

"It wasn't my fault we got married. . . . Have you forgotten? You have Count Sergey Pavlich to thank for it . . . and you had some responsibility, too. He was full of envy for me because I was a better shot than he was, and he kept me drinking for a whole month, and when a fellow is drunk, you can make him do

100 anything—get married, change his religion, anything! Out of revenge he married me to you when I was drunk. . . . A huntsman marrying a cow girl! You saw I was drunk, so why did you marry me? You were not a serf—you could have refused! Sure, it is a lucky thing for a cow girl to marry a huntsman, but you have to use your brains. Now you are making yourself miserable, and crying. The

Continued

¹bast shoes—shoes made from rope-like plant fibres

105 count thought it was a joke, but you went right on crying . . . beating your head against a wall. . . .”

Silence followed. Three wild ducks flew over the clearing. Yegor watched them, following them until they became three barely perceptible dots, and then they vanished on the other side of the forest far away.

110 “How do you live?” he asked, no longer looking at the ducks, but at Pelageya.

“This time of year I go out and work, and in the winter I take a baby from the foundling hospital and bring it up on the bottle. For that they give me a ruble² and a half a month.”

“So . . .”

115 Again there was silence. From a field which had been reaped there came the first soft notes of a song, which broke off abruptly. It was too hot for singing.

“They say you built a new hut for Akulina,” said Pelageya.

Yegor was silent.

“Are you fond of her?”

120 “It’s just your luck, it’s fate!” said the huntsman, stretching himself. “You have to suffer, poor orphan! Good-by! I’ve been chattering too much! . . . I have to reach Boltovo by evening.”

Yegor rose, stretched himself, and threw his gun over his shoulder. Pelageya got up.

125 “When are you coming to the village?” she asked softly.

“No reason for me to come. I won’t come sober, and I won’t be much use to you if I come drunk. I’m mean when I’m drunk. Good-by!”

“Good-by, Yegor Vlassich.”

Yegor put his cap on the back of his head, made a clicking noise with his
130 tongue to summon the dog, and went on his way. Pelageya stood there and watched him going. She followed the movement of his shoulder blades, the vigorous young neck, the lazy and careless gait, and her eyes were full of melancholy and tender affection. . . . Her eyes ran over the tall, lean figure of her husband, and caressed and fondled him. As though he felt the force of her gaze,
135 he stopped and looked back. . . . He did not speak, but from his face and the thrust of his shoulders Pelageya knew he wanted to say something to her. She went up to him timidly, gazing at him imploringly.

“Take it,” he said, and he turned away.

He gave her a crumpled-up ruble note, and walked on quickly.

140 “Good-by, Yegor Vlassich,” she said, mechanically taking the ruble.

Continued

²ruble—the unit of the Russian monetary system before World War I, equal to about 50 cents, and divided into 100 kopecks

He went down the long road, which was as straight as a taut strap. She stood there pale and motionless as a statue, following closely each one of his footsteps. Soon the red color of his shirt melted into the dark color of his trousers and she could no longer follow his footsteps, and the dog became indistinguishable from his boots. At last she could see only his cap, and suddenly Yegor turned sharply to the right into a clearing, and the cap vanished in the green depths.

“Good-by, Yegor Vlassich,” whispered Pelageya, and she stood on tiptoe, hoping to see the white cap.

Anton Chekhov (1860–1904)
Russian fiction writer and playwright

Credits

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